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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 005746

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/26/2015

TAGS: PREL PGOV ECON ETRD EG SY LE

SUBJECT: EGYPT AND ARAB LEAGUE PRIVATELY PRESSING SYRIA TO
END BORDER BLOCKADE OF LEBANON

REF: A. STATE 136239 (NOTAL)

1B. STATE 136754 (NOTAL)

Classified by Charge Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

11. (C) The Charge raised the issues of Syria's blockade of Lebanon's border and prevention of terrorist transit to Iraq (refs A and B) July 26 with Presidential Spokesman and Senior Advisor Soliman Awad. Awad said that the GOE took the respective issues seriously and said that President Mubarak continued to press President Asad hard on Syria's behavior. The Syrian President was expected soon in Egypt, at which time the Lebanon and Iraq issues would again be discussed. In separate conversations, senior GOE and Arab League contacts confided that the GOE and Arab League were quietly and forcefully pressing the Syrian government to curtail its border blockade and other harassment of Lebanon. President Mubarak called President Asad July 17 to stress the need for Syria to avoid raising tensions over Lebanon. Amre Moussa reportedly warned the Syrian President and Foreign Minister during a July 17-18 trip to Damascus to avoid causing problems with Lebanon. End summary.

Presidency on Syria-Lebanon Border and Insurgency

12. (C) In a meeting with Senior Presidential Advisor and Spokesman Ambassador Soliman Awad July 26, the Charge raised Syria, asking for Egypt's assistance on the issue of Syria's closure of its border with Lebanon and on pressing Syria to do more to prevent foreigners from entering Iraq to engage in terrorism (refs A and B). Awad said that President Mubarak was continually pressing Bashar. In a July 17 phone call, Awad said Mubarak had sternly told Bashar that Bashar was "wading into problems" by creating issues for the Lebanese. Mubarak said that even though Syrian troops and "most" of the intelligence personnel had been withdrawn from Syria, Bashar should realize that the Lebanese people would never accept continued meddling by Syria. Mubarak had raised a package of issues with Bashar including Syrian interference in Lebanese government formation, detention of Lebanese fishermen, demanding exorbitant compensation for Syrian civilian deaths in Lebanon, and the border blockade issue. Awad said that he was personally in touch with UN Envoy Terje Roed-Larsen on the subject and said that every time that Awad gave Mubarak a read-out indicating Syria was causing problems, Mubarak immediately called Bashar.

13. (C) Awad said that Mubarak had been expecting Bashar to come to Egypt "this week" and said that this would have been another opportunity for Mubarak to counsel the Syrian. Bashar, however, sought a visit by Mubarak to Damascus instead - an offer rejected by Mubarak. Awad said Mubarak told him (Awad) that he had rejected the offer since "any visit to Damascus now would be seen as a sign of support for the Syrians." Bashar was not expected to visit Cairo this week, Awad continued, since he was working on a government "reshuffle." Nevertheless, he noted, Asad was expected soon.

14. (C) On the issue of infiltration of extremists through Syria (ref B), Awad said Mubarak had raised the issue with Bashar forcefully and that Bashar had claimed to be taking some actions including fortifying parts of the border with "barbed wire and sand ditches." Although Awad agreed that Bashar could do more he noted that the problems in Iraq would not be solved even if the border was sealed. Finally, Awad reiterated President Mubarak's message to the Secretary that the U.S. should establish a back channel with Syria to directly communicate our requirements. He assured the Charge that President Mubarak nonetheless would continue to press Bashar on these issues.

Demarches to MFA and Arab League

15. (C) Poloff delivered reftel demarche on the Syria/Lebanon border issue July 25 to MFA cabinet staff member Amr

Sherbiny. Sherbiny noted that the GOE was very concerned by Syrian actions and noted that President Mubarak called Asad July 17 to discuss the issue. Sherbiny said Mubarak told Asad "not to create problems," not to blockade Lebanon's borders, and to help Lebanon form a new government. Sherbiny was unaware of the Syrian response to Mubarak's intervention but noted that a Lebanese Government was formed the following day, hinting that Mubarak's call had had a positive impact. Sherbiny added that the Egyptian Embassy in Damascus reported to Cairo its observation that the Syrian Government's seemingly punitive actions toward Lebanon were popular among Syria's elite and general populace. Poloff stressed that the Syrian actions were troubling and inconsistent with the development of peace and stability in the region.

16. (C) During a separate meeting July 25 with a senior Arab League Secretariat official, poloff pressed reftel points on the Syrian blockade of Lebanese borders and requested the League to do all it could to pressure Syria to end its economic harassment of Lebanon and bring the current crisis to a close. The official, after assuring poloff that the message would be conveyed to the Arab League Secretary General upon the latter's return from New York, said that Secretary Moussa took the situation seriously and had already

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been actively engaged on the subject directly with senior Syrian and Lebanese leaders. Moussa reportedly met with Syrian President Asad July 17 and with the Syrian Foreign Minister July 18, during which the Arab League Secretary General was "very forceful" on the topic. He said that the Secretary General considered the issue to be important and

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that the latter would continue to follow up. Responding to a question on whether Moussa's intervention had any positive impact, he suggested that the nine Lebanese fishermen briefly detained by the Syrians were released after Moussa made a phone call to the Syrian Foreign Minister urging their release.

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JONES